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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the social interaction between foreign students and American students. Data were collected through interviews with foreign students and two roughly equivalent forms of a questionnaire; one designed for foreign students and the other for American students. Analysis of the data shows that although social contacts between the two groups are infrequent and superficial, these contacts are viewed positively by both groups. Most of the contacts take place within the classroom and, contrary to general belief, language is not perceived as a barrier to communication. Ninety-five percent of the American students believe that the presence of foreign students on campus contributes to their general education. Conclusions and recommendations from this study are: (1) international students represent a valuable potential resource for psychological education programs with an emphasis on intercultural, international dimensions; (2) informal contacts between American students and international students are somewhat limited, with both groups desiring more contacts with each other; and (3) counselors and other personnel workers with an interest in personal and social development of students should devise programs that actively involve foreign students in extracurricular activities with American students. (Author/PC)

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: UNTAPPED RESOURCE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: UNTAPPED RESOURCE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION:

Modern developments in technology have made the world smaller, bringing peoples of the world into closer proximity with each other. This has given urgency to the task of understanding and dealing with the people whose cultural background is different from ours. It is no longer possible for any nation to live in isolation from others. Problems, whether political, economic or soical, in one part of the world necessarily impinge upon others. Also, solutions to these problems often require international cooperation.

The approximately 135,000 foreign students attending U.S. institutions of higher education today represent a valuable resource for International and inter-cultural education. The extent to which this resource is actually used is not known because the impact of foreign students on American students and communities has not been studied to any appreciable degree. (Deutsch, 1970)

In the guidance and counseling profession a great deal of interest is currently focused on the concept of psychological education. The authors of the concept and its chief proponents, have recommended the use of psychological education for a wide variety of purposes. Some of the major purposes, as stated in the literature, are:

a) To promote the personal development of the student through dealing directly with his developmental concerns, such as, understanding personal reactions to life situations, formulating personal goals and a philosophy of life, and relating self to others. (Moser and Sprinthall, 1970, Gum et al, 1973)

b) To counteract some of the negative effects of an overly intellectual curriculum, imposed upon students in a dehumanizing way. (Sprinthall, 1971)

c) To make learning more intentional, purposive, and experiential. (Ivey and Alschuler, 1973; Tiedeman and Miller Tiedeman, 1973)

d) To build better human relations through counteractiving racism and sexism in individuals and institutions. (Anderson and Love, 1973; Delworth, 1973)

In line with the above, it could be argued that psychological education may be used also for dissolving narrow parochialism, provincialism, and jingoistic nationalism, often encountered in students, teachers, and administrators alike.

Foreign students on American campuses could make a significant contribution to this aspect of psychological education, both through informal contacts with students and staff and by being involved in more structured activities with them.

PROBLEM AND METHOD

A preliminary investigation into the social interaction between foreign students and American students was conducted recently at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. The entire foreign student population (N=15) and a small sample of American students (N=50), taken randomly from populations exposed to foreign students, was included in the study. Data was collected through interviews with foreign students and two roughly equivalent forms of questionnaire; one designed for foreign students and the other for American students.

FINDINGS Analysis of the data showed:

1) Social contacts between foreign students and American students, despite being infrequent and superficial, are viewed positively by both groups.

2) Ninety five percent of the American students believed that the presence of foreign students on campus contributed to their general education. Some of the specific comments were:

---you can learn about cultural differences on a personal, first-hand basis. Your perspective on other people is broadened.

---you learn about different life styles. Meeting new people, especially someone from a different country, helps you to grow socially.

3) Most of the contacts between the foreign students and American students took place within the classroom. Foreign students and American students typically did not belong to the same student organization. Fifty percent of the American students did not belong to any organized activity on campus.

4) Foreign students were rarely called upon by instructors to talk about some aspect of their experience which might have a bearing on the subject under discussion. Forty percent of the foreign students never had this experience.

5) Contrary to general belief, language was not regarded as a barrier to communication with foreign students. Only about eight percent of the American students mentioned cultural differences in outlooks and interests as a barrier to communication with foreign students.

6) Both groups of students desired more contact with members of the other group, and complained of lack of opportunity.

CONCLUSIONS

1) International students represent a valuable potential resource for psychological education programs in school and colleges with an emphasis on intercultural, international dimensions.

2) Informal contacts between American students and international students are somewhat limited. Both groups desire more contacts with the other.

3) Counselors and other personnel workers with an interest in personal and social development of students should devise programs that actively involve foreign students in extracurricular activities with American students.

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